

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL COMMENTS ON
PACIFIC WHITING MANAGEMENT FOR 2006

The GAP heard a presentation from whiting stock assessment authors Tom Hesler and Guy Fleisher with a follow-up presentation from GMT representative to the STAR Panel John Field.

2006 Assessment

The GAP accepts the current assessment. The GAP understands that the model is sensitive to recruitment and that there is uncertainty surrounding the 2003 year class. The PWCC juvenile hake survey showed above average 2003 and strong 2004 year classes; this data was not included in the current assessment. Therefore, the GAP recommends that future assessments use all available data, including the PWCC survey.

The GAP recognizes there is a great deal of uncertainty in the current model, for example, the virgin biomass estimate seems unrealistically high, harvest level projections also seem unrealistically high, and recent recruitment, e.g. 2003 and 2004 year classes do not appear to be fully accounted for in the model. The hake stock is dependent on strong year classes to maintain its biomass. As noted, the PWCC survey provides evidence that the 2003 year class is above average and the 2004 year class is strong. Moreover, young fish started to appear in the 2005 fishery. While it is undetermined what their contributions will be to the stock, the GAP is confident that this recent recruitment will provide for a stable fishery.

Proposed OY

The GAP recommends status quo management for the 2006 whiting fishery, which results in a 365,000 mt coast-wide OY. Subsequently this results in a 270,000 mt harvest guideline for the U.S.

Justification for status quo can be seen in Table 1 from Document F4a. If we set 2006 OY at Status Quo of 365,000, this is below the 400,000 in the table. Relative to the 400,000 harvest level, status quo harvest of 365,000 mt would result in a slower rate of depletion. The two models produce different relative depletion levels. Under status quo harvest, there is no risk of reaching overfished in 2007 under the freely estimated q model. Conversely, there is the potential to approach the overfished level if $q=1$ is the true state of nature. However, this time next year we will have new assessment information, including data from the 2006 fishery. If the declining trend continues, the council can adjust harvest levels in 2007 to prevent reaching the overfished level. But the GAP reiterates that evidence exists of incoming recruitment from the 2003 and 2004 year classes. Therefore, the GAP believes that status quo management is a precautionary response to the status of the whiting stock and meets the needs of the whiting fishery.

Management Measures

The GAP supports status quo bycatch caps of 4.7 mt on canary rockfish and 200 mt for widow rockfish, but believes that an additional cap on darkblotch rockfish is unwarranted.